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FOR AMBASSADOR BOUCHER FROM AMBASSADOR STAPLETON

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SUBJECT: PRESSING THE FRENCH ON AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: Ambassador Craig R. Stapleton for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)  
)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION: On December 12, Ambassador to Afghanistan William Wood met with French officials to brief them on the situation in Afghanistan and to press the GOF to host an Afghan Donors Conference in May or June of 2008. Both Christian Masset, Director General for Economic and Financial Affairs, and Nicolas de la Grandville, the President's advisor on Asian Affairs, confirmed that the GOF was considering holding the conference. However, both underlined that the timing is not optimal since France will be taking the EU Presidency in July ¶2008. Neither Masset nor de la Grandville could say when or by whom a decision on hosting the conference would be made. Embassy Recommendation: This decision will be made by President Sarkozy or Foreign Minister Kouchner. While the Ministry is hesitant to take this on, they understand a decision will be taken at the Ministerial or Presidential level and expect the Secretary to raise it in her bilateral meetings on December 17. I recommend the Secretary make a strong and direct push to Kouchner on

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hosting the conference, and raise with Sarkozy what more France can do militarily in Afghanistan, including deployment of forces from Kabul to the south. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) During meetings with MFA Economic Director Christian Masset on December 12, Ambassador Wood discussed the situation in Afghanistan and the need for a donors, conference. Ambassador Wood highlighted U.S. economic assistance as proof that the U.S. is fully committed to success in Afghanistan. Wood stressed the strategic and humanitarian importance of Afghanistan. Masset, who was keenly interested in learning Wood's assessment of the situation on the ground and its impact on upcoming elections, said he understands the political importance of hosting a conference in Paris, but called it a "very heavy exercise." Masset elaborated that the timing poses a problem for the GOF since they will be taking over the EU presidency in July 2008, but they will "reflect" on the issue.

¶3. (C) Ambassador Wood also met with Presidential Advisor for Asia Nicolas de la Grandville on December 12. De la Grandville, who acknowledged that he recently took over the Asia portfolio and was not yet an expert, mentioned drugs as one of France's primary concerns. Ambassador Wood briefed de la Grandville on counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan and urged the GOF to increase its engagement. De la Grandville reaffirmed President Sarkozy's commitment to and interest in doing more, but he did not provide specifics on how the French might increase their engagement. In response to Ambassador Wood's request that France host a donors,

conference, de la Grandville responded that the French are considering the idea, but it is just before France takes over the EU Presidency and there are high expectations for France and for the President.

14. (C) Ambassador's Comment: Following my discussions with Ambassador Wood, my staff and I believe that senior career staff understand that France is committed at the political level to the broad international mission in Afghanistan, but they have no clear instruction or directions on how to implement this commitment. These decisions will be made by Kouchner and Sarkozy. I suggest that the Secretary press Kouchner to agree to the donor conference and put France in a leading role regarding humanitarian and development support for Afghanistan as a strong opener to the French EU presidency. A decision on greater military engagement can only come from President Sarkozy. In her bilat with the President, I recommend the Secretary explain directly what we would like the GOF to do

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in southern Afghanistan and why. There are rumors in the press of a possible Sarkozy visit to Kabul in February or March which the Secretary could ask about, and which would provide an obvious opportunity for a presidential decision on deploying additional French forces beyond Kabul.

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